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# PERFORMANCE RATINGS OF SUPERVISORS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: THE SUBORDINATES' VIEW

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper presents the results of a study designed to investigate the ratings of supervisors and subordinates on the role performance of heads of departments in Nigerian universities.*

*The results indicate that the subordinates rated their supervisors' performance low (fair) and their mean scores were generally lower (fair) than those of the supervisors except in the 'initiating' and 'supervising' functions where they were in agreement. A t-test result also reveal a significant difference between the ratings of subordinates and supervisors. Based on these results, it was concluded that subordinate staff in Nigerian universities had higher role expectations for their supervisors and this may have influenced the ratings.*

## Introduction

This study, carried out in 1993, analysed the subordinates' ratings of the supervisors' role performance in some selected universities in Nigeria.

According to Gallagher (1978, p. 35) performance ratings are sometimes influenced by individual points of view that do not really relate to actual job performance. He believes that such subjective factors may affect the outcome of the rating scores and should be recognised when interpreting the trend in performance ratings.

In Nigerian universities, people sometimes relate the role performance of supervisors to their work behaviour. Often, such phenomenon lead to expressions such as, "the incumbent

- (a) is approachable and operates an open-door policy (democratic)",
- (b) is erratic and does not involve others in decision-making (autocratic)" or,
- (c) is a very free and accommodating person who accepts everyone and every situation in the office (*laissez faire*)".

Inevitably, such impressions often influence the way co-workers will assess the performance of the individual.

Magin (1973) seems to support this view when he suggests that an approach to the evaluation of role performance should be based on the comparison of the incumbent's role behaviour with role definitions as expressed by subordinate staff. The subordinate staff in this case are senior academic and nonacademic staff who work with the supervisor on a daily basis and it is accepted that they are capable of assessing the supervisors' performance since they have some expectations of what the supervisor should do or not do.

Since the departmental heads (supervisors) have different tasks to perform in the administrative governance of the unit, the following questions arise:

1. What is their level of performance on these roles?
2. How do their subordinate staff perceive their efforts?, and
3. How do they rate their level of performance on each of these roles?

Thus, the main purpose of this study was to examine and analyse the ways subordinate staff in Nigerian universities rate the performance of their supervisors on each of their outlined administrative roles. Also, an attempt was made to compare the average ratings of both the supervisors and subordinates and to find out whether differences exist between the scores.

## **Literature Review**

Universities all over the world have their own ways of doing things in order to achieve administrative excellence. Yet, there are no hard and fast rules on the acceptable standards of performance for the administrative leadership of a department, particularly in Nigeria. This may be so because appointments to the academic headship are not strictly based on expertise or experience but on seniority or status (Enaohwo & Eferakeya, 1989).

In Nigerian universities for example, no performance standards or criteria are developed for the assessment the on-the-job administrative performance of the departmental heads (Okoli, 1981; Koko, 1993). Departmental heads themselves may be handicapped to carry out effective evaluation of their performance as a result of this flaw. Nevertheless, Hillway (in Miller, 1974) contends that because of the growing influence of administration in educational programmes and the demands for accountability, there is need to evaluate the work of administrators.

In supporting this view, Miller (1974) suggests that the set objectives of each university should form the bases for such evaluation. Essentially, the main objective of universities in Nigeria is to achieve academic excellence through effective teaching and learning, research, and community services. Miller goes further to suggest that assessment of performance should be related to expectations held for the roles and only those capable of making valid judgements should take part in it.

Some researchers suggest the effective tools to be utilised for such evaluations as rating scales, questionnaires, multiple choice documents, and models. According to Miller (1974) and Okoli (1981), these tools identify qualities for effective performance such as;

- (a) the provision of team-effort leadership;
- (b) the ability to organise;
- (c) the encouragement of democratic participation;
- (d) the ability to play active roles in decision-making in the unit;

- (e) the ability to encourage effective communication network with subordinates; and
- (f) adaptability and good judgement, etc..

Although the outlined qualities have some influence on performance, McFarland (1979) believes that an individual's performance has a relationship to his knowledge of the subject matter. In other words, perception has a vital role to play in performance. Invariably, members of staff also may have their own role expectations for the supervisor; what he or she is expected to do and what he should not do. But it is a simple fact that no two people could perceive a phenomenon in exactly the same way and this may produce diverse opinions on the supervisor's performance. It is expected that such differences may occur in this study and thus influence its results and findings.

Aderounmu and Ehiamentor (1989) identify the administrative responsibilities of the departmental heads in Nigerian universities as involving activities in directing, controlling, and leading others (subordinates) towards the attainment of departmental goals. This confirms the importance of the individual roles of the supervisor and the need for the regular assessment of their performance of these functions.

## **Method**

This study is a descriptive survey, designed to examine the level of administrative performance of supervisors in selected Nigerian universities as rated by their subordinate staff. It involved six Nigerian universities namely University of Port Harcourt, Lagos, Jos, Makurdi (Agriculture), Ondo State University, and Rivers State University of Science and Technology.

## **Sample**

There were 2,485 subordinates (senior staff) and 257 supervisors (departmental heads) in the 257 academic departments in these universities. Ten per cent of the 2,485 (248) subordinates and 40% of the 257 (102) supervisors were randomly selected as the sample for the study.

## **Instrument**

A self-developed 15-item Likert-type instrument titled Supervisors' Performance Appraisal Questionnaire (SPAQ) derived from literature review was used to collect information from respondents.

The instrument sought information on how the subordinates/ supervisors perceived the roles and performance of the supervisors on some outlined administrative functions on which they based their ratings. These functions were identified as planning, leadership, organising, stimulating, decision making, adapting, commitment, controlling, supervising, and evaluating (Table 1).

## **Procedure**

The respondents were expected to rate the performance of the supervisors on his/her roles using the five-point Likert type scale of very poor (1); poor (2); fair (3); good (4) and very good (5).

## **Validity and Reliability**

The questionnaire was validated using experts in educational administration and measurement while the reliability was established using the test-retest method. Twenty-five respondents in a university outside the sample were used and a reliability coefficient of 0.92 was achieved using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation  $r$ .

## Data Analysis

The mean scores achieved from the data analyses were interpreted as follows; 0.00 to 2.49 poor performance; 2.50 to 3.99 fair performance and 4.00 and above, good performance. The 4.00 and above mean scores was set as the acceptable level of performance.

The mean scores were further exposed to higher statistical analysis using the t-test for significant difference between two independent means. The level of significance was set at 0.05.

**Table 1**

### **Average Rating of Supervisor's Performance by Subordinates and Supervisors**

Administrative Roles	Mean Scores	
	Subordinates N = 222	Supervisors N = 91
1. Leadership	3.31	4.16
2. Planning	3.68	4.08
3. Organising	3.60	4.04
4. Stimulating	3.59	4.29
5. Decision-making	3.65	4.18
6. Communicating	3.63	4.10
7. Initiating	3.66	3.93
8. Adaptability	3.63	4.10
9. Commitment	3.63	4.17
10. Controlling	3.75	4.06
11. Supervising	3.47	3.94
12. Evaluating	3.75	4.01



Table 2

**T-Test Analysis of Subordinates and Supervisors' Rating**

Groups	No	Mean	S.D	S.E	Critical	Calculated
Supervisors	91	48.83	4.31	.452	1.96	5.23*
Subordinates	222	43.67	8.95	.603		

\* P 0.05

**Interpretation of Individual Role Items****1. Leadership**

This role item suggests a supervisor who should be able to exhibit good leadership traits and has the ability to inspire teamwork, originate new work methods and start the process as well as train staff to achieve results. The mean score was found to be 3.71.

**2 Planning**

This item describes the supervisor's ability to establish and formulate effective plans to achieve desired departmental goals and objectives. The subordinates' means scores were found to be 3.68.

**3. Organising (Team Builder)**

This item suggests that the supervisor should have the ability to organise and build up both human and material resources of the unit. The average ratings were 3.60.

#### **4. Stimulating**

This role suggests a supervisor who is able to motivate his/her staff to make greater efforts towards the attainment of departmental goals. The mean score was 3.59.

#### **5. Decision-making**

This item describes a supervisors with the ability to make sound and logical decisions, exercise good judgement and see problems objectively. The average rating was 3.60.

#### **6. Communicating**

This item suggests the ability of the supervisors to relate effectively with his/her subordinates in order to encourage group cohesiveness and participation as well as communicate departmental needs to higher authorities. The mean score was 3.65.

#### **7. Initiating**

This role item suggests the supervisor's ability to introduce new methods of work, start the process through showing examples as well as recruit qualified and competent staff in the department. The rating score was 3.66.

#### **8. Adaptability**

This has to do with the supervisor's ability to accept changing conditions and handle special projects without having prior knowledge of the nature of work. The mean score was 3.68.

#### **9. Commitment**

This described the supervisor's ability to give self-less service to subordinates and the community. The mean score was 3.63.

## **10. Controlling**

The supervisor's ability to exercise adequate control over all human and material resources of the sub-units, and maintain standards of work. The rating score was 3.75.

## **11. Supervising**

This role item describes the ability to effectively direct, guide, and evaluate the job performance of workers and at the same time, ability to prepare and train staff on the job. Subordinates' mean score was found to be 3.47.

## **12. Evaluating**

This item describes the ability of the supervisor to appraise the extent to which departmental goals are achieved and suggest a line of action to maintain achieved goals. The rating score was 3.75.

## **Findings**

Table 1 displays the ratings of supervisors and subordinates on the performance levels of the supervisor's administrative roles. Column 2 outlines the 12 administrative roles; columns 3 and 4 indicate the mean scores of the raters.

Some interesting findings were recorded in this study.

- (1) The subordinates' ratings on each of the twelve administrative roles of the supervisors suggest that they had higher expectations which the supervisors could not meet. They rate the supervisors' performance on all the roles as fair.
- (2) Generally, the subordinates' rating were below that of the supervisors on all the 12 functions.

- (3) There was an agreement between the subordinates and supervisors on their ratings in two functions (initiating and supervising). They both scored these functions as 'fair' (3.66/3.93; 3.47/3.94) respectively.
- (4) It was found that generally, the supervisors rated themselves higher while the subordinates rated them lower.
- (5) Although the supervisors rated themselves high (good) they did not find their performance on the initiating and supervising functions as good.
- (6) generally, it was found that the supervisors' performance on each of the roles as rated by the supervisors themselves and the subordinates did not meet the acceptable level of 'good' performance.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

The role performance of supervisors in the universities studied was generally inadequate. The findings revealed that subordinate staff in Nigerian universities held higher expectations for the different roles of their supervisors hence their ratings were lower than those of their bosses. This is not surprising because there are no set standards by which the supervisors can assess themselves while performing their duties in the universities. Also, the supervisors usually do not have enough time as a result of tenure limitations (two years), to reevaluate their performance and improve on them.

Although the subordinates and the supervisors were in agreement in their rating in two of the functions (initiation and supervision), subordinates did not rate these functions as 'good'. It was expected that the subordinate raters would record high performance scores on these two functions. Firstly, when the subordinates were given the instruments, they expressed their personal views that most of the supervisors are slave drivers and high-handed in their approach towards their workers. Thus, it was expected that they would score them highly for effectively executing that particular function but the reverse was the case. Secondly, on the 'initiation' function, the raters expressed surprise that the supervisors were expected to introduce new ways of doing things in the department. They believed there were existing ways of running

the departments in Nigerian universities which could not be changed. Yet, this perception did not influence a higher rating by the subordinates. This result is in consonance with the works of Lipham and Hoeh (1974.), Okoli (1981) and Koko (1993) who found a relationship between the leadership pattern of the supervisor and his/her subordinates' acceptance of his/her behaviour. In the same vein, Magin (1973 and Okoli (1981) also asserted that role evaluation should be based on expectations held for the role(s). This has been confirmed by the present result.

The result from the *t*-test analysis reveal a difference between the ratings of supervisors and their subordinate staff (P). This finding suggests that the supervisors' role performance as expected by the subordinates did not meet the acceptable level.

Essentially, there is need to create workers' awareness in the importance of the role of departmental heads in Nigerian universities and to encourage them to contribute fully to the achievement of departmental goals. There should be regular assessment of the departmental heads' (supervisors) administrative performance in order to improve the administrative skills of the supervisors.

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